



State of Louisiana
Department of Health and Hospitals
Bureau of Health Services Financing

August 31, 2015

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Room TW-B204
Washington, DC 20554

Re: 47 CFR Part 54: Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support, Connect America Fund; Proposed rule – FCC 15-71

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

As the Medical Director of Louisiana's Medicaid program, and as a practicing obstetrician who sees first-hand the challenges faced by low-income pregnant women and babies in Louisiana, I am writing to strongly encourage the commission to retain Medicaid as a qualifying criteria for the Lifeline program.

Today, over 88,000 Medicaid beneficiaries in Louisiana are benefitting from the program. Thanks to Lifeline, they have free "health phones" which they can use to communicate with their health care providers and access critical services available to them under Medicaid. In addition, they are able to take advantage of health information and support services available to them through their health plans.

Louisiana Medicaid provides health coverage to over 1.2 million Louisianans and covers 42,000 births each year, 63% of the state's total births. Sadly, Louisiana suffers from one of the highest rates of premature births in the country. We in the Louisiana Medicaid program and our Medicaid managed care organization (MCO) partners are working very diligently to address that challenge and the Lifeline program is a key part of our strategy.

The vast majority of Louisiana's Medicaid beneficiaries are covered by one of the five MCOs in Louisiana, all five of which are working with Lifeline wireless providers to make Lifeline health phones available to our beneficiaries. These health phones are only made available to Louisiana Medicaid beneficiaries who appear on our state Medicaid eligibility files.

One of the key ways that we and our MCO partners are leveraging these health phones is by enrolling our pregnant women in the Text4baby program, a text message based education, support and monitoring program. Text4baby delivers critical, time sensitive health information to women week-by-week during pregnancy and the baby's first year. It also helps identify women who are at high-risk for pre-term deliveries and connects them to the resources and support they need to reduce their risk of delivering a premature baby.

Many published studies have documented Text4baby's positive impact on key health goals for pregnant women and babies. An article published in July in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine documented a 2X increase in flu shot utilization.ⁱ Another randomized study demonstrated a reduction in alcohol consumption and smoking among pregnant women.ⁱⁱ Providing this kind of support to pregnant women and new mothers is critical.

Making Lifeline phones available through Medicaid is a key element of our efforts to improve birth outcomes and health outcomes more broadly among our state's most vulnerable population. I encourage the Commission to retain Medicaid as an eligibility criteria for Lifeline so that this important support can continue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Rebekah Gee'.

Dr. Rebekah Gee
Medical Director
Louisiana Medicaid

ⁱ Jordan, E.T., Bushar, J., Kendrick, J., Johnson, P., Wang, J. (2015). Encouraging Influenza Vaccination among Text4baby Pregnant Women and Mothers. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. Published online July 29, 2015. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2015.04.029>. Available at: [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(15\)00213-5/abstract](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(15)00213-5/abstract)

ⁱⁱ Evans, W. D., Wallace, J. L., & Snider, J. (2012). Pilot Evaluation of the Text4baby Mobile Health Program. BMC public health, 12(1), 1031. Available: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/12/1031>